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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CACEN, EUR/SNEC, INR/REA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KZ](#) [GG](#) [POLITICAL](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: SAAKASHVILI AND NAZARBAYEV MEET IN
ASTANA

Classified By: POEC Chief Deborah Mennuti, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) Summary: Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili made a state visit to Astana March 30-April 1. Presidents Nazarbayev and Saakashvili met at Nazarbayev's new residence in Astana, conducted a joint press conference and talked alone for two unscheduled hours following the state dinner for Saakashvili on March 30. Although the situation in Kyrgyzstan consumed a significant part of the leaders' conversation at their official meeting (and Saakashvili issued a joint statement on the subject with Ukrainian President Yushchenko during the visit), the tangible results of the talks were confined to new understandings on investments and economic cooperation. While to all outward appearances the visit went off without a hitch, the GOK viewed Saakashvili's visit with some trepidation from the time it was announced, and their consternation seemed to increase as events in Kyrgyzstan unfolded. The GOK took care to keep Saakashvili out of any venues where he might make statements that the Kazakhstani opposition could seize on as signs of support. End summary.

A Calm, Cordial Visit...

2. (C) The DCM of the Georgian Embassy in Astana (who was present at all of the official events) provided a detailed readout of the visit to Emboff after Saakashvili's departure. The outward results of the visit were positive, if modest. Four protocols were signed - establishing a partnership between Astana and Tbilisi, another between the port authorities of Aktau and Poti, a memorandum of understanding on trade relations and an additional protocol to their mutual legal assistance treaty. In their official meeting, which the DCM described as lengthy and productive, the two presidents also discussed the possibility of increasing the amount of Kazakhstani oil that transits the Baku-Sup'sa pipeline, in addition to BTC. Both sides expressed general interest in Kazakhstani export of natural gas to Georgia.

3. (C) The DCM confirmed that Kyrgyzstan was discussed, and reported that Nazarbayev repeated the appraisal of the situation that he made publicly: that the Kyrgyz revolution was carried out by criminals and hooligans, and that the country's low standard of living was to blame. It does not appear that Saakashvili made any proposals to Nazarbayev on the situation (Akayev had not resigned yet), although the Georgian Foreign Minister dropped out of the President's delegation to go to Bishkek and remained there throughout Saakashvili's Astana visit.

4. (SBU) The two Presidents held a joint press conference, where they emphasized the growing commercial relationship between Kazakhstan and Georgia (trade turnover in 2004 only approached \$40 million, but has quadrupled in the past three years). Saakashvili was effusive in his praise for Kazakhstan's market reforms and even its political evolution and made a point of praising Nazarbayev by name several times.

5. (C) Nazarbayev hosted a dinner for Saakashvili in the new Presidential residence "Ak Orda." After the dinner, Nazarbayev invited Saakashvili for an impromptu tour of Astana. According to the DCM, the two Presidents toured the city without aides for two hours, making stops at the "Baiterek" monument and the "Duman" saltwater aquarium.

But It Didn't Start Out That Way

5. (C) Although in the end the visit went smoothly, the DCM told Emboff that it was obvious from the start that the GOK viewed Saakashvili's visit with trepidation, which was clearly compounded by the situation in Bishkek. The GOK's discomfort was most evident in its undiplomatic handling of Saakashvili's itinerary, which MFA officials privately said was out of the Ministry's control.

6. (C) The Georgian DCM reported that the Ministry refused to draft a schedule for the visit, only grudgingly providing one when the Georgians insisted it was Kazakhstan's

responsibility. The MFA also suddenly, after preparations were well underway, insisted on changing the character of the visit from an official to a state visit. The DCM believed that the GOK felt that doing so would impose a more ceremonial, rehearsed structure on the visit.

17. (C) The most contentious arguments took place over Saakashvili's speaking engagements. The Georgian side requested time for Saakashvili to address both the Parliament and the students and faculty of Gumilev Eurasian University.

While the address to Parliament appears to have been a non-starter, MFA's first draft of the schedule included the address to the students. State Protocol quickly reneged on that proposal, explaining that the University was "too busy" that day.

18. (C) MFA working-level officials told the DCM that this was not MFA's call, and Volkov himself told the DCM that he had been "reprimanded" for including the university address in the first schedule. Volkov indicated that there were "differences in approach" to the visit in various quarters of the GOK. In the end, Saakashvili gave a private talk to selected students and faculty from the Diplomatic Academy.

19. (C) The DCM told Emboff that these and other indications of GOK hostility to the visit spurred the Georgian side to file a last-minute flight plan requesting departure on March 30 (i.e. the same day as Saakashvili's arrival) in the event of a major snub to their President. He suggested that Nazarbayev personally decided whether Saakashvili would make the speeches the Georgians had requested.

Comment

110. (C) For all of the wrangling that preceded the Nazarbayev-Saakashvili meeting, it turned out to be businesslike and uneventful. Each leader seems to have gotten what he wanted: Saakashvili appears to have piqued Kazakhstani interest in increasing trade with and investment in Georgia, and Nazarbayev got through the visit without providing the opposition access to Saakashvili or a statement from the Georgian President they might seize as an indication of support. Clearly, very senior figures in the GOK feared that unscripted appearances by Saakashvili before Parliament or the University risked providing the opposition with a political boost. Those fears were almost certainly amplified by the unanticipated events in Bishkek, which unfolded in the week leading up to the visit. Given concern in the upper echelons of the GOK about the collapses of other post-Soviet governments, preparations for the late April visit of President Yushchenko of Ukraine will likely proceed in a similarly confrontational manner. End comment.
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